



# Carrier Air Wing Eleven

By Rick Llinares

During more than 60 years of service, Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 11 has evolved to meet the ever-changing mission. Today, the staff of CVW-11, based at NAS Lemoore, Calif., comprises approximately 25 officers and 25 enlisted personnel. Operating from *Nimitz* (CVN 68), the wing's organic assets include VFA-14 with the F/A-18E Super Hornet; VFA-41 flying the F/A-18F Super Hornet; VFA-94 with the F/A-18A Hornet; VAQ-135 flying the EA-6B Prowler; VAW-117 with the E-2C Hawkeye; and HS-6 flying the SH-60F and HH-60H Seahawk. When deployed, the wing will be augmented with VMFA-232 F/A-18C Hornets and C-2A Greyhounds from VRC-30.

Maintaining a high level of proficiency is no small task for an air wing. Air wing commander Captain Jim Greene described some of the wing's recent challenges and successes. "CVW-11 spent about 13 months of a 14 month period away from home, starting with workups in late 2002 and culminating in an 8 month deployment to the Arabian Gulf aboard *Nimitz*. We arrived in the Gulf approximately two weeks after the initial strikes of Operation Iraqi Freedom, yet four of our brand new Super Hornets (two F/A-18Es and two F/A-18Fs) got to

the fight one week early. The robust airborne refueling capability of a 5-wet (one buddy store and 4 external tanks) Super Hornet allowed us to organically refuel four Super Hornets on a 1,600 mile, one-way trip to Diego Garcia, B.I.O.T., from the eastern Indian Ocean. From there they followed a USAF KC-135 and landed on *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN 72) to augment CVW-14 for a full week of combat operations before *Nimitz*'s arrival."

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Background, operating from *Nimitz* (CVN 68), Carrier Air Wing 11 was a key player in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Photo by PH3 Kristi Earl. Clockwise from facing page top, a VAQ-135 EA-6B Prowler returns from a surface search mission on 17 April 2003. Photo by PH2 Michael Pusnik, Jr. A VS-29 Naval Flight Officer conducts a preflight checklist on 13 April 2003, during the Viking squadron's final deployment before deactivating. Photo by PH2 Michael Pusnik, Jr. An F/A-18E Super Hornet of VFA-14 takes off from *Nimitz* on 31 March 2003. Photo by PH3 Yesenia Rosas.

Rick Llinares captured these CVW-11 aircraft flying in formation over the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California. An E-2C Hawkeye of VAW-117 leads an F/A-18E Super Hornet of VFA-14, foreground, and an F/A-18F Super Hornet of VFA-41.







After returning from the *Nimitz* deployment in November 2003, the air wing maintained a fast pace. “Approximately 25% of the air wing (17 aircraft and 500 personnel) embarked *Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76) during her homeport change from Norfolk, Va., to San Diego, Calif., the highlight of which was a two-day transit of the Strait of Magellan,” Capt. Greene said. “In June, another 25% of the air wing supported *Lincoln’s* deck certification. For a little over a week, CVW-11 was operating in two different oceans and two different hemispheres simultaneously.”

Power projection is what the wing is all about, and CVW-11 has significant combat experience. CAG Green commented, “Since I arrived in 2001, the air wing participated in the first strike against Taliban forces in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) from the deck of *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70). When we returned from that deployment in January 2002, we traded VF-213 and VFA-22 for the first two Tomcat-to-Super Hornet transition squadrons, VFA-14 and VFA-41, which



**Top, VFA-94 F/A-18C Hornets fly in formation in October 2003. Photo by PH3 Kristi Earl. Above, an HS-6 HH-60H Seahawk approaches *Nimitz* on 30 April 2003. Photo by AN Angel Hilbrands. Left, a VRC-30 C-2A Greyhound prepares to launch from *Nimitz* on 1 July 2003. Photo by PH3 Yesenia Rosas. Below, on 8 June 2004 a VFA-14 F/A-18E, right, and a VFA-41 F/A-18F prepare to launch from *Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76) as the Brazilian carrier *São Paulo* steams alongside. Photo by PHAN Aaron Burden.**



## CVW-11: From WW II to OIF

Carrier Air Group 11 was established in October 1942 and made its first deployment as a shore-based group at Guadalcanal in 1943. In 1944 the group deployed aboard *Hornet* (CV 12). During the Pacific war, CVG-11 was credited with destroying over 600 enemy aircraft, as well as numerous enemy surface combatants and merchant ships. The air group received the Presidential Unit Citation for its achievements.

In July 1950 the air group deployed to the Korean theater aboard *Philippine Sea* (CV 47). CVG-11 helped keep the Pusan perimeter from collapsing in the early phases of the conflict, took part in the assault on Inchon, and supported the landing at Wonson. Following the major Chinese offensive in November 1950, the group participated in operations around the Chosin Reservoir and then supported the evacuation of over 150,000 troops and civilians from the Chosin/Yalu areas to Hungnam. The group remained in theater supporting operations until they crossdecked to *Valley Forge* (CV 45) to return to the States. CVG-11 served two additional Korean deployments, aboard *Philippine Sea* in 1952 and *Kearsarge* (CVA 33) in 1953.

The Navy redesignated the air group as Carrier Air Wing (CVW 11) in December 1963, and in October 1965 it deployed to Vietnam aboard *Kitty Hawk* (CV 63) as part of the Seventh Fleet. The wing conducted seven combat deployments, and received the



**Carrier Air Wing 11 has comprised many different aircraft during its more than 60 years of operations. Above, two VF-213 F4B Phantom IIs loaded with ordnance conduct a combat mission in Vietnam.**

Presidential Unit Citation and two Navy Unit Commendations.


During a deployment to the Arabian Gulf in April 1988, CVW-11 led a major strike against Iranian warships and facilities, for which the wing received the Joint Meritorious Unit Award. During two subsequent gulf deployments aboard *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN 72), the wing flew in support of Operation Southern Watch in Iraq. During the 1993 deployment, the wing also supported Operation Restore Hope in Somalia.

Assigned to *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70), the air wing deployed in 1998 for Operations Desert Fox and Southern Watch in Iraq. Its 2001 cruise began with operations in support of Southern Watch and concluded with the wing's participation in Operation Enduring Freedom. Assigned to *Nimitz* (CVN 68), the air wing deployed in 2003 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Currently preparing for a future deployment aboard *Nimitz*, CVW-11 continues its long legacy of distinguished service.

included the first operational two-seat Super Hornet. The all-Hornet air wing proved effective during our Fallon det in December 2002, and we were more than ready to participate in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. When major combat operations were over, the other carrier strike groups departed and the *Nimitz*/CVW-11 team stayed through the summer to provide on-call close air support for coalition forces on the ground.”

When VS-29 deactivated on 30 April 2004, it marked the end of the S-3B Viking's service with CVW-11. As with the departure of the Tomcat from the air wing, the wing's Super Hornets took up the Viking's traditional missions. “The strike fighters of CVW-11 will truly have

to be multimission capable as they take over the maritime interdiction role and 100% of the airborne tanking mission from the Vikings,” Capt. Greene said.

Even as its composition changes, the air wing's mission remains the same. CVW-11 continues to provide the flexibility, range, and lethality needed by Naval Aviation, anytime, anywhere. 

Rick Llinares is a professional photographer and writer specializing in Naval Aviation. The author thanks Capts. Jim Greene and “TC” Cropper, Cdr. Jim Calvert, and the staff of CVW-11 for their assistance. Special thanks to Cdr. John Fleming, CHINFO, for his support of this article.